

DISPATCHES FROM THE KABUL CAFÉ

Passionately advocating women's rights, **Heidi Kingstone's** account of her time in Kabul is an atmospheric, poignant series of vignettes of life on the edge of a war

Journalist **Heidi Kingstone** creates a number of sketches that when drawn together provide a fascinating insight into life in war-torn Afghanistan.

Living in the expat community between 2007 and 2011, Kingstone takes out her journalistic pen to create an overall picture of life illuminated by an array of characters.

The different insights take in mercenaries, soldiers, cleaners, NGO workers, fashionistas, activists and people simply struggling to get by in a war-torn country. It is not all blood and destruction though, with Kingstone able to convey a real love for Afghanistan and its people – something that is all too rare in accounts written about that country over the past few decades.

Kingstone lived for most of the period in Kabul, working for various publications, whilst trying to illuminate the story of women's rights. And this theme comes through in the various different sketches from the revolutionary girl Hasina to

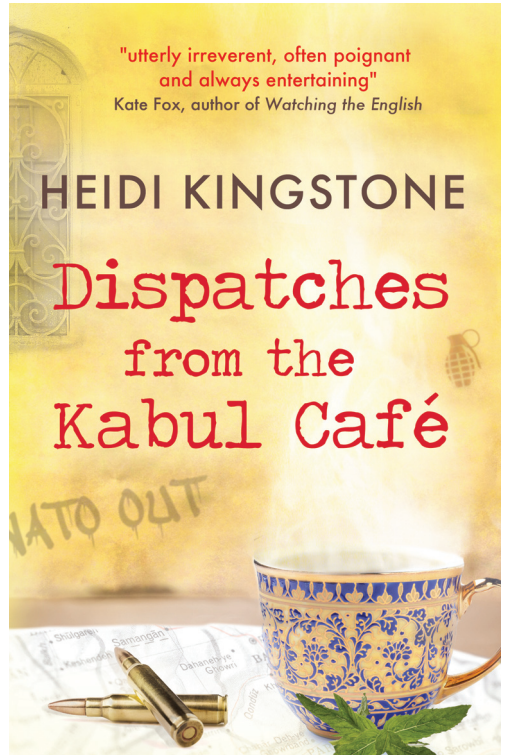
Dunia, the cleaner who doesn't like cleaning but loves to dance. What does come over strongly is the problem of westerners trying to impose their concept of rights - without ever really acquainting themselves as to what Afghani women are up against in a deeply

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chauvinistic society.

Dispatches from the Kabul Café offers a glimpse of life in Afghanistan, through real lives. At times the reader would like to know more and maybe have a stronger narrative thread between sketches, but overall a comprehensive picture is presented. It gives a taste of life in a war-torn country by blending together accounts of the people who live there and those coming in to “help.”

The great strength of the book is that whilst it brings



Above: The book is available as a paperback or as an e-book

home scenes of poverty and death, it never strays into cloying sentimentality. The Afghans come out as a proud people, whose land has been abused but remains a fantastic place to be. There is much joy and excitement in daily life in Kabul. There is also that buzz of life as a reporter in a war zone, on the edge, with the constant threat of death.

A number of Kingstone's friends die either during or after her time in Afghanistan. There is also something of an intrigue about Kingstone herself, the book offers insights into her personality that draw the reader into wanting to know more about the subject and its scribe – a job well done.

● Published by Advance Editions, price £10.99